



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Bruce Flax, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Diane Barber, Joe de la Cruz, Greg Grim, Karen F. Morton, Bonnie Nault, Deb Peruzzotti, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Flax called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Grim, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Nault and Councilor de la Cruz

Also present was Town Manager Mark Oefinger.

3. Calendar and Communications

- National League of Cities Congressional Cities Conference Report

Councilor Watson noted the information included in Councilors' agenda packets regarding the National League of Cities conference. He suggested waiting to discuss this item until Councilor Nault can be in attendance. Councilors and the Town Manager will be having follow-up meetings with legislators' staff to pursue issues raised at the conference.

4. Approval of Minutes

2016-0084 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of March 8, 2016 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2016-0036 Small Cities Community Development Block Grant - 2016 Application

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Town Council held a public hearing on the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant 2016 application at the last Town Council meeting. An overview of the program and project were provided by Paige Bronk, Manager of Economic and Community Development. The application is for \$800,000 to continue the rehabilitation and improvement initiatives at the Groton Housing Authority properties. No public comments were received.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Morton, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2014-0312 School Facilities Initiative Update**Discussed**

The Council received a presentation and recommendations from the School Facilities Initiative Task Force at a special meeting of the Committee of the Whole on March 16th. Town Manager Oefinger explained that if the Council is receptive to the project and wants to move it forward, the next step is to authorize the bond attorney to prepare the ordinance. The Town Manager reviewed steps in the process. He added that there is plenty of time to ask questions, but he needs to know if the Council is receptive to moving forward.

In response to Councilor Barber, the Town Manager explained reimbursement rates for racially imbalanced schools, which does not apply to Groton, versus the reimbursement being requested through special legislation. Time is of the essence for the Town to show positive support for the project due to the short legislative session. The meetings with the state on special legislation were very positive and the public opinion survey showed that the community could support a \$55 million bond referendum. With respect to plans for vacant schools, Town Manager Oefinger feels it is premature because it will be many years before anything needs to be done with the buildings.

In response to Councilor Morton, the Town Manager noted that the Town will incur some costs for the bond attorney, but that is usually rolled into the cost of the project.

(Discussion of this referral was extended to the next referral #2016-0083 Authorization to Prepare a Bond Ordinance for the School Facilities Initiative.)

2016-0083 Authorization to Prepare a Bond Ordinance for the School Facilities Initiative

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

(Discussion of this referral was continued from the previous referral #2014-0312 School Facilities Initiative Update)

Councilor Grim asked if the Board of Education budget could be reduced through special legislation to reflect cost savings associated with the Groton 2020 plan in light of the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). Town Manager Oefinger explained that documented cost savings can be deducted from MBR under the current legislation.

Mike Graner, Superintendent of Schools, noted that closing a school is one of the provisions in the MBR legislation. Sizable operational savings would be reflected in the Board's budget. Dr. Graner noted that the state was very positive about helping Groton, but they want to know that the municipal leaders support the referendum. For a \$196 million project, the Town is asking the state for \$141 million. The Task Force has done its work and now it is a question of political will. If the special legislation is not successful, the Council can stop the referendum process. Dr. Graner noted that the cost to Groton would then be \$119 million and a referendum would not be successful.

Councilor Antipas suggested that people will start to become more involved at this point and he would like to move the project forward to let the conversation begin. Councilor Peruzzotti noted that the Task Force was made up of diverse people and interests. Town leaders must educate the community so that voters are informed. She feels the plan is viable and wants to move forward.

In response to Councilor Grim, Town Manager Oefinger explained that the bond authorization will be for the total project cost, but that is not the amount that is ultimately bonded. If anything were to happen to the state funding, the Town Council could pull the project prior to construction.

Councilor Morton supports the project because of the phenomenal amount of funding that may be available from the state. She expressed concern with the increase in the FYE 2017 Proposed

Budget and stated the Town Council must do its part to keep the tax increase at zero.

Mayor Flax noted the Groton 2020 initiative is the culmination of years of work by a group of dedicated people. It is time for information, questions, and ideas to be discussed. With respect to vacant schools, Mayor Flax believes that the first order of business is to let the neighborhoods have a say in their disposition.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0091 Alexey von Schlippe Gallery at Avery Point

Discussed

David Madacsi, a co-founder of the Alexey von Schlippe Gallery at Avery Point, was present to address the Council. He explained that UCONN at Storrs plans to close the gallery at the end of July, which will eliminate all of the arts and cultural programs developed by the gallery over the last 24 years. Mr. Madacsi wrote an editorial for The Day, which generated many on line comments. He asked the Council to support retention of the gallery at Avery Point. Mr. Madacsi summarized the history of and programs associated with Alexi von Schlippe and the gallery named in his honor. The gallery's core programs have included artists' exhibitions, the sculpture path, a jazz festival, a Shakespeare festival, poetry boxes, and a Latin exhibition/festival.

Councilor de la Cruz arrived during discussion of this referral.

Councilor Peruzzotti asked why the college wants to close the gallery and Mr. Madacsi stated for budgetary reasons. He does not feel that the gallery is appreciated and there has been no response to his appeals for reconsideration. The only cost is for one full time salary; otherwise the gallery operates on a non-profit model.

Mr. Madacsi asked the Council to write a letter of support asking that the gallery be retained and stressing its significance to the region as a component of cultural tourism and economic development. Mr. Madacsi asked that the letter be sent to members of the UCONN administration and legislative delegation, and that the letter mention retaining the gallery under the direction of Julia Pavone.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Barber, Councilor Grim, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Nault

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0082 Distracted Driving Grant

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger explained this is a recurring grant to increase police patrols to address distracted driving.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Barber, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0086 Department of Education Youth and Family Services Funding

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted this is a recurring grant from the State Department of Education that covers the costs of counseling activities and programs.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2016-0087 Department of Education Youth Services Enhancement Grant**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted this is a recurring grant from the State Department of Education and funds are used to support a popular summer program.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0219 FYE 2017 Budget Discussion**Discussed and Recommended no action taken**

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the budget review schedule has changed due to conflicting schedules. He suggested having a discussion about how to proceed through the accounts prior to starting deliberations. The issue this year is one of revenues. The proposed budget results in a 1.73 mill increase or approximately 8%. Staff is exploring Minimum Budget Requirement opportunities. The Town Manager cautioned that minor reductions will not address the budget increase. If no changes are made to the Board of Education portion of the budget, a zero increase will require a 10% reduction across the board for the remainder of the budget.

Discussion followed on the date for the Board of Education review and Councilors' conflicts. Mayor Flax suggested April 5th to review the Board of Education budget, in lieu of the Personnel and Appointments Committee meeting.

Councilor Morton requested information on savings associated with a furlough day for Town employees.

Discussion followed on moving the accounts scheduled for April 11th to April 12th in lieu of the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Mayor Flax asked for an outline of revenue reductions and how the fund balance was reduced. The Town Manager noted that the big issues are a reduction in the Grand List; reduction in federal impact aid; and unavailable fund balance, which is attributable to many reasons. Councilor de la Cruz asked about factors that contributed to the decrease in the Grand List and the Town Manager stated that a fair amount is Pfizer personal property.

In response to Councilor Barber, Town Manager stated he is concerned with tax increases, but the problem is self-created. There are decisions that the Town Council and RTM need to make. If the Council is not willing to increase taxes and there is no hope for additional revenues, then the Council must decrease services. The Town Manager will have a list of areas for the Council to consider, but they are not significant money savers.

2016-0021 Proposed Adjustments to Retiree Pension Benefits**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger noted that staff would be providing additional information concerning potential costs associated with across the board COLA increases for all retirees.

A motion was made by Mayor Flax, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that the Committee of the Whole along with Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Human Resources Director Bob Zagami, and Town Attorney Eileen Duggan go into executive session at 7:32 p.m. to discuss strategy and/or negotiations pertaining to multiple bargaining units. This action is taken without prejudice to the Town's ability to meet in private pursuant to General Statutes Section 1-200 (2).

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 8:03 p.m.

2016-0005 Pending Litigation (2016 Standing Referral)

A motion was made by Mayor Flax, seconded by Councilor Watson, that the Committee of the Whole along with Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Eileen Duggan go into executive session at 8:03 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes 1-200 (6) (B) for the purpose of discussing strategy and/or negotiations regarding pending employment litigation.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 8:10 p.m.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to authorize Town Manager Mark Oefinger to execute any documents necessary to finalize a settlement agreement reached in CHRO Case Number 1540327 and Grievance 15-01 on the terms outlined in executive session. Due to a question concerning the Town's notice compliance under FOIA for its special meeting on March 15, 2016, this action is taken out of an abundance of caution and supersedes the prior action taken by the Committee of the Whole on March 15, 2016.

The motion carried unanimously

2015-0298 Establishment of a Charter Revision Commission

Discussed

The Town Council completed interviews of 22 candidates for a proposed Charter Revision Commission. Councilor Nault submitted her suggested list of appointees and felt that the discussion should take place in executive session. Town Manager Oefinger stated that this matter does not qualify for executive session. Mayor Flax indicated he would gather Councilors' lists of suggested appointments for discussion at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

2016-0079 Request for Donation for Thames River Heritage Park Water Taxi

Discussed

At the last Committee of the Whole meeting, the Town Council received a letter requesting a \$10,000 donation to the Thames River Heritage Park Water Taxi. The donation has not been included in the FYE 2017 Proposed Budget. If the Council is supportive, the funds would have to be added to the budget. Mayor Flax noted the Heritage Park presentation at the Garde on March 31st at 6:00 p.m. The consensus was to consider this item after the presentation.

2016-0008 Joint Meeting with City of Groton (2016 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The Council has received a request from the City for a meeting regarding the FYE 2017 City highway budget. A meeting has been scheduled for March 29th at 5:30 p.m. prior to the public hearing on the proposed budget. Other items for discussion could include Heritage Park, economic development, and Sub Century. Mayor Flax noted that according to the Charter, three City Councilors are supposed to meet with the entire Town Council, not just three Town Councilors as requested by Mayor Galbraith.

Councilor de la Cruz questioned the status of arbitration. Town Manager Oefinger stated that it is scheduled to begin on Friday, April 29th so the Town Council will be done with the budget review. If there is a dispute about the FYE 2017 funding, the amount in dispute still needs to be budgeted. Once an arbitration decision is rendered, the Council can decide what to do for the next year. Mayor Flax suggested that the whole City Council be invited to meet with the Town Council about the FYE 2017 City highway budget.

2016-0090 City Highway Budget - FYE 2017

Discussed

(See discussion in March 22, 2016 Committee of the Whole minutes under #2016-0008 Joint Meeting with City of Groton (2016 Standing Referral).)

Town Manager Oefinger explained that this referral is intended to provide a brief update concerning the City highway budget arbitration and what it means going forward.

A motion was made by Mayor Flax, seconded by Councilor de la Cruz, to enter executive session at 8:31 p.m. with the Town Manager to discuss the City highway budget update for the upcoming arbitration meeting.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Councilor Barber left the executive session at 8:47 p.m.

The executive session concluded at 9:13 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Flax, Councilor Grim, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Morton, Councilor de la Cruz, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Councilor Barber and Councilor Nault

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m.